

UPPER DARBY, PA — Congressman Joe Sestak (PA-07) spoke at the Crime in Our Community Seminar on Sunday, February 22, 2009, at St. Alice Church in Upper Darby. The Congressman addressed members of the Southasian and Vietnamese community about law enforcement, crime victims' compensation, and the availability of constituent services.

The Congressman highlighted his support for interpretive services provided by Executive Order 13166, signed in 2000, which ensures that "meaningful effort" shall be given to obtain interpretive services for those with a low level of English proficiency when dealing with local agencies that receive federal funding. He discussed how that effort works in conjunction with the Civil Rights act of 1964 and how additional efforts have been made in Congress to ensure that those learning English have the same access to programs as their fellow citizens.

The Vietnamese community has recently been struggling with incidents of violent crime. On November 10, 2008, Hoa Pham, 60, a local resident and member of St. Alice Church, was found murdered. Pham, who came to the United States 17 years ago, was a decorated veteran of the Vietnam War who fought alongside American forces and was held captive in North Vietnam for seven years.

"Mr. Pham, a dedicated church member and veteran, as well as a proud husband and father, was a role model and an asset to our community," said Congressman Sestak. "In times of strife, it is essential to come together as a community."

Since he was first elected to office, legislation in support of crime victims has been one of Congressman Sestak's top priorities. The Congressman has supported lifting the cap on deposits to the Crime Victims Fund. The Fund, established by the Victims of Crime Act of 1984 (VOCA), is a major funding source for victim services throughout the nation. Millions of dollars have been deposited into the Fund annually from criminal fines, forfeited bail bonds, penalties, and special assessments collected by U.S. Attorneys' Offices, federal U.S. courts, and the Federal Bureau of Prisons. To date, Fund dollars have always come from offenders convicted of federal crimes, not from taxpayers. Previous legislation expanded the sources from which Fund deposits may come. Passed in October 2001, the USA PATRIOT Act provided authority for the deposit of gifts, bequests, or donations from private entities. When the Fund was authorized in 1984, a cap was placed on how much could be deposited into it for the first 8 years. The amount of money deposited into the Fund has fluctuated from year to year. Lifting of the cap in 1993 allowed for the deposit of all criminal fines, forfeited bail bonds, penalties, and special assessments authorized by VOCA to support crime victim program activities. In 2000, Congress

reinstated the cap on the Fund. Under this scheme, the actual amount of funding available for programs authorized by VOCA is determined each year during the appropriations process.

“I support lifting the cap so that many people may continue to benefit from the many important programs that this fund supports,” said Congressman Sestak.

Congressman Sestak also supported the Local Law Enforcement Hate Crimes Prevention Act (HR 1592). The act would strengthen federal hate crimes statutes by removing unnecessary obstacles to federal prosecution and by granting authority to the Attorney General to provide technical, forensic, prosecutorial, or other assistance in the criminal investigation or prosecution of any crime that constitutes a crime of violence under federal law or a felony under state, local, or Indian tribal law and is motivated by prejudice based on the actual or perceived race, color, religion, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, or disability of the victim or is a violation of the state, local, or tribal hate crime laws. HR 1592 would also enhance the federal response to hate crimes violence by covering all violent crimes based on race, color, religion or national origin, gender, sexual orientation, or disability.

“Hate crimes have a destructive impact on not only the victims, but on our communities as well,” said Congressman Sestak. “The struggle against hate crimes must be won if we are going to be able to protect all of our citizens, nation and democracy.”

Attendees of the Crime in Our Community Summit included the Mayor of Upper Darby, Tom Micozzie; Mike Green, District Attorney; Tsiwen Law, member of the Asian Pacific Bar Association; Djung Tran, Head of Outreach of the Asian Pacific Bar Association; Mayon Post, President of the Asian Pacific Bar Association; Anne Van Dyke, Director of the Pennsylvania Human Rights Commission; and Captain David Young, Pennsylvania State Trooper.

*Born and raised in Delaware County, former 3-star Admiral Joe Sestak served in the Navy for 31 years and now serves as the Representative from the 7th District of Pennsylvania. He led a series of operational commands at sea, including Commander of an aircraft carrier battle group of 30 U.S. and allied ships with over 15,000 sailors and 100 aircraft that conducted operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. After 9/11, Joe was the first Director of “Deep Blue,” the Navy’s anti-terrorism unit that established strategic and operations policies for the “Global War on Terrorism.” He served as President Clinton’s Director for Defense Policy at the National Security Council in the White House, and holds a Ph.D. in Political Economy and Government from Harvard University. According to the office of the House Historian, Joe is the highest-ranking*

*former military officer ever elected to the U.S. Congress.*

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